

A systemic crisis in Greece*

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The cold blooded murder of a 15 year old student –part of a long sequence of murders and police brutalities that characterized the entire post-civil war period in Greece, including the post-junta period– acted as a catalyst for a social explosion and, at the same time, made abundantly clear the continuous worsening of the multidimensional crisis to which we have referred many times in the past^[1].

Why a systemic crisis?

The crisis in Greece, as in every other country which has been integrated into the internationalised market economy, is, at the outset, an economic one, as a result of the opening up and deregulation of its markets that this integration implies. In the Greek case, this followed its entry into the EU.^[2] The effects of the country's integration into the internationalised market economy have been, as everywhere, a huge and continuously growing gap between, on the one hand, the elites and the privileged social strata which benefit from capitalist neoliberal globalisation and, on the other, the rest of the population which suffers the effects of unemployment, job insecurity, and poverty to which more than 20% of the population is presently condemned. Given that most young Greeks in the past used to be employed in the significant nationalised sector, the privatisation of large segments of it, combined with the effective destruction of the agricultural and manufacturing sectors, as a result of the opening of markets, has led to massive unemployment among the young people, with Greece having one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the Eurozone. At the same time, the adopted model of “export-led” growth has led to a huge current account deficit in the Balance of Payments of about \$53bn –or 15% of GDP– which is easily the highest in the Eurozone. No wonder the present financial crisis is expected to hit Greece particularly hard, not only because of the effects of world recession on tourism, but also because its public debt is presently almost equal to its national output –one of the legacies of the 2004 Athens Olympics, which, at a cost of a record £9.4 bn to stage,^[3] was an economic disaster. Not surprisingly, the present government is currently borrowing at excessive rates in the world markets, while the bill, i.e. the huge expenses to “service” this debt, will be paid later by the lower social strata (which traditionally carry the lion's share of the tax burden in Greece), in the form of more taxes and less social spending.

However, the crisis does not only refer to the economic institutions, i.e. the capitalist market economy in its current phase of neoliberal globalization, but also, to what passes as “democracy” and “politics” today, i.e. representative “democracy” and “politics”, as

carried out by the professional politicians of all parliamentary parties. This crisis is expressed by the popular disdain for the two main parties (and the corresponding family dynasties which have run Greece for the last half a century or so, i.e. the Karamanlis clan of the New Democracy party and the Papandreou clan of the PASOK party) which are distinguished for their corruption and fostering relations of citizens' dependence on them. In fact, it is exactly this dependence, vastly enhanced by the corrupt bureaucratic state mechanism created by the same professional politicians, which ensures their re-election, given that the lower social strata cannot secure a job, or even a proper medical care for that matter, unless they have the necessary "connections" with the highly corrupt political class. No wonder, that probably the main characteristic of the recent social eruption in Greece is the confirmation of the fact that a large part of the population, particularly young people who have not yet been integrated into the political and economic system –and the chances of doing so in the future are slim!– are uncontrollable by the political elites. And this refers not just to the professional politicians of the two governing parties, but also to those of the traditional Left which presently are engaged in a dog fight to restore some control on the electorate, with the Alliance of the Left party (SYRIZA) a reformist Left party integrated into the European Union and the party of the "European Left", attempting to attract votes from the revolting youth by praising their militancy, while the Communist Party (KKE) attempts to attract votes from the older generation of its supporters (who are now mostly law-abiding citizens voting for PASOK) by attacking SYRIZA for supporting lawless elements within the youth movement!

Furthermore, the crisis is also a deeply social one, as the past eruptions of the student movement have shown with respect to the attempts by neoliberals and social-liberals to implement the EU instructions to privatize education^[4]. Finally, it is an ecological crisis, as it was tragically shown in the summer of 2007, when the effect of the combination of climatic change and the criminal elite's corruption was scores of poor peasants burned to death.^[5]

Last, but not least, the crisis is not only institutional, referring to the main economic and political institutions of Greece, but also –and mainly– a crisis of values, i.e. a crisis which questions the very values which support these institutions, or better, what we may call the *dominant social paradigm*, namely, the system of beliefs, ideas and the corresponding values which are dominant in a particular society at a particular moment of its history^[6]. Thus, the youth movement which developed during the present crisis, implicitly or explicitly, questioned the individualistic values of competition and greed, as well as those of selfishness and consumerism –in short, the values of heteronomy, which are either founded on the political, economic and, in general, social institutions, or on spiritual heteronomy resulting from religious irrationalism.

This is, therefore, a systemic crisis.

The spectre of insurrections today

Of course, this crisis is not just a Greek phenomenon. Instead, at this very moment, a spectre is haunting the world which has adopted the capitalist market economy system:

the spectre of massive insurrections which the transnational and local elites fear are about to explode as a result of the accumulation of anger among the non-privileged social strata. This is the rage caused by the realisation of the magnitude of their deception all these years that hard work (and in some cases exhausting work, as for example, in “miracle” countries like China, India, etc.) and the accumulation of degrees would lead to a constant improvement of their standard of life, that is, their level of consumption. A deception, which becomes now clear when they discover that this agonizing effort, though leading to an expansion of the middle classes especially in the North, has led the vast majority of the world’s population to live in insecurity, if not in abject poverty. At the same time, they witness the constant deterioration of their quality of life and, sometimes their life itself being threatened for the sake of economic growth and “development”, which distributes the largest portion of social wealth to the elites, the privileged social classes and their descendants, while the leftovers are distributed to the rest to buy off their tolerance^[7].

It is, therefore, clear that, as long as this multidimensional crisis deepens, the social eruptions in the North and South will multiply. So, it is not at all surprising that the elites in all these countries are reinforcing their terrorist weaponry which they call “anti-terror” legislation, and which, in effect, aims at controlling their own populations.^[8] And, of course, nothing will change if the present system adopts a “human” face by introducing some reforms of itself, (as requested by the reformist Left), which will leave the fundamental political, economic and social structures reproducing the system intact.

A new May ‘68?

Today’s social explosions, either those in the suburbs of Paris a few years ago^[9], or the present one in Greece, do not have the familiar characteristics of the past “politicised” insurrections, which culminated in May ‘68. This is what clearly differentiates the former from the latter and, particularly what the elites and the ideologues of the system within the academia and the mass media call “blind violence”, namely, the popular counter-violence against property. This violence never turns against life –in contrast to systemic violence that has no problem in readily sacrificing it, despite their hypocritical protestations of human life as the “ultimate good”. Instead, it turns only against either the symbols of economic and political power (banks, transnational corporations, Government and police departments, etc.) or against the symbols of consumerism. However, these aims are not determined collectively through a conscious democratic (or not) process –as was the case in May ‘68 when the aims of protest were determined through the student assemblies or the various political organizations– but, on principle, individually and on the basis of a usually subconscious repulsion for the institutions and values of the system. Of course, as in any uprising, not all participants are driven by similar motives. For instance, survival considerations usually motivate impoverished immigrants or drug addicts, both of whom are the main victims of social oppression –not to mention the cases of secret services’ agents and provocateurs who simply aim at discrediting the popular counter-violence.

However, the “blind” character of present popular counter-violence gives it a positive as well as a negative character. A positive character, which expresses the popular spontaneity

that is based on –at least– a subconscious perception of the systemic causes of the crisis and which turns the rage of the participants against the symbols of the system. And, a negative character, because this very spontaneity, when not driven by a universal political project (that is, an elementary analysis of the causes of the crisis, a rudimentary vision of the form the alternative society should take, and a strategy leading to it) inevitably leads to a dead end and to the brutal suppression of all these spontaneous uprisings, through the use of even more raw violence, while the “silent majority” remains sitting on their sofas, under the full control of professional politicians. The need, therefore, for the development of a mass movement on the basis of a new antisystemic project, which could lead to an alternative, worthy of its name, democracy, that is an inclusive democracy, is more imperative than ever.

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– A shorter version of this article was published in the fortnightly column of Takis Fotopoulos in the mass circulation Athens daily, *Eleftherotypia*, (3/1/2009). ([link](#))

[1] See e.g. the articles in the last issue (Vol. 4, No. 4, October 2008) under the general title: THE MULTI-DIMENSIONAL CRISIS GETS WORSE

[2] Takis Fotopoulos, “Economic restructuring and the debt problem: the Greek case”, *International Review of Applied Economics*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1992).

http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/fotopoulos/english/brvarious/restruct_irae_92.htm

[3] Simon Osborne, “After The Party: What happens when the Olympics leave town”, *The Independent* (19/08/2008).

[4] Takis Fotopoulos, “The Struggle Against the Privatisation of Education in Greece”, *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (April 2007).

http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol3/vol3_no2_Takis_education_Greece.htm

[5] Takis Fotopoulos, “The deadly fires in Greece: a “tragedy” or the inevitable outcome of the criminal elites’ activities?”, *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (October 2007).

http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol3/vol3_no4_takis_The_deadly_fires_in_Greece.htm

[6] See Takis Fotopoulos, “Mass media, Culture and Democracy”, *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (March 1999). http://www.democracynature.org/vol5/fotopoulos_media.htm

[7] See Serge Latouche, “De-growth: an electoral stake?”

http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol3/vol3_no1_Latouche_degrowth.htm and Takis Fotopoulos, “Is degrowth compatible with a market economy?”, *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (January 2007).

http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol3/vol3_no1_Takis_degrowth.htm

[8] See e.g., Jenni Russell, “The all-seeing state is about to end privacy as we know it”, *The Guardian* (8/10/2008), & AC Grayling, “Safety in our cages”, *The Guardian* (26/8/2008).

[9] See Takis Fotopoulos, “The European Left and the myth of the European social model”

http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/newsletter/vol2_no4_European_Left.htm & “France: The revolt of the victims of neoliberal globalisation”, *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (November 2006).

http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/newsletter/vol2_no4_revolt_victims_global.htm

